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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 000639

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [KDEM](#) [KCOR](#) [OVIP](#) [ASEC](#) [BG](#)
SUBJECT: HASINA EN ROUTE TO BOSTON

REF: DHAKA 632

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina departed Dhaka the morning of June 12 as scheduled; she plans to arrive in Boston at 1825 local time June 12. In meetings with leaders of her party, the Awami League, following her release from prison June 11, Hasina instructed her deputies to participate in a dialogue with Bangladesh's Caretaker Government and prepare for parliamentary elections scheduled for December 2008. Hasina also met with the four Advisers to the Caretaker Government leading the dialogue with the political parties, and she spoke by phone with Bangladesh's Chief Adviser, Fakhruddin Ahmed. The temporary resolution of the impasse between the Awami League and the Caretaker Government represents a major success for pragmatists in the government who realized they could not sideline Hasina and still achieve credible national elections by the end of the year. All eyes now turn to the ongoing talks between the Caretaker Government and the arch rival of the Awami League and Hasina, the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) and its imprisoned leader, former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

HASINA DEPARTS, INSTRUCTS AL TO PARTICIPATE IN DIALOGUE

2. (C) Sheikh Hasina departed Bangladesh at approximately 0830 local time June 12. Accompanied by three members of her personal staff, she is en route to Boston, where her son resides; she will seek medical care there or perhaps in Florida, where members of her family resided previously. During a four-hour layover in London, she will be met by her sister, Sheikh Rehana. Following an emotional return to her Dhaka residence after her release from prison June 11, Hasina met with Awami League leadership. According to AL leaders present at the meeting, she thanked them for keeping the party united despite attempts by some in the government to foster a breakaway faction. She also described her suffering during her 11-month imprisonment. She did not share any details about the negotiations with the Caretaker Government (CTG) to secure her release, but she instructed her deputies to participate in the political dialogue with the CTG and prepare for national elections scheduled for December.

3. (C) One of Hasina's traveling companions, her secretary Dr. Hasan Mahmud, told the media she would return to Bangladesh after her medical treatment, a message she echoed

just before departing Dhaka. Hasina said Acting Awami League President Zillur Rahman should lead the party in the dialogue with the CTG in her absence. She also encouraged her deputies to continue with party activities in her absence.

14. (C) Hasina met briefly with the four advisers leading the CTG's dialogue -- Communications Adviser Ghulam Quader, Commerce Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman, Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, and Law Adviser A.F. Hassan Ariff. During that meeting Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed called and spoke to Hasina, who urged an end to the State of Emergency and that national elections be held "as soon as possible." According to some present, the meeting with Advisers did not include an in-depth discussion of substantive matters, but rather was a symbolic gesture to demonstrate the start of a dialogue between the CTG and Awami League.

15. (U) Hasina's departure from Zia International Airport in Dhaka the morning of June 12 went off without a hitch, though in an atmosphere of heightened security. Traffic congestion was relatively limited, and crowds at her residence and the airport were peaceful. Locally engaged staff at the Embassy coming to work from that part of Dhaka reported minimal delays.

COMMENT

16. (C) Sheikh Hasina's release and departure represent a victory for those in the Caretaker Government who urged

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negotiation with her, despite the corruption charges she faces. Those trials will continue in her absence. After 18 months of trying to sideline Hasina, many in the government realized they could not shake her hold on the Awami League or ignore the broad support she still receives in Bangladesh. Those in the CTG anxious to stick to the electoral roadmap and elections in December also realized her release was the only way to bring the Awami League to the negotiating table. It remains to be seen whether the two sides can hammer out a deal that clarifies Hasina's future role and ensures the party's participation in the political process. The fact that the Awami League has now agreed to participate in the dialogue may put pressure on the rival BNP and its alliance partner, Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), to join the process. In the wake of Hasina's release, leaders of both these parties called for equal treatment for imprisoned BNP leader Khaleda Zia and her two sons and for the imprisoned JI Ameer, Maulana Motiur Rahman Nizami. We understand discussions are underway with Zia and will follow this angle closely in the coming days.

Moriarty